

Can the Lion Lie Down With the Lamb?: Missions and Unity

- Samuel Hugh Moffett

I bring congratulations from a very old seminary to a rather young seminary, and if that sounds patronizing let me add that in doing so I find myself whittled down to size very quickly. Princeton is justifiably proud that on its 25th anniversary it appointed to its faculty what seems to have been the world's first professor of missions. But that was 150 years ago. Today I find that I cross a whole continent to find that the greatest school of world mission is right here at Fuller. Congratulations.

I have been asked to speak on ecumenics and missions. Let me add a subtitle to point up a central problem one faces in trying to speak on both missions and ecumenics at the same time, on Christian outreach and Christian unity in the same address. My subtitle is "Can the Lion Lie Down With the Lamb?". Lions and lambs do not easily lie down together, and neither do missions and unity. The phrase, of course, is an echo of Isaiah's beautiful vision of the millennial Kingdom of God, a "peaceable kingdom", where "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:6,9).

But I found the phrase used at one point in American church history to describe quite the opposite. Not a peaceable kingdom, but rival, warring missionary churches trying but failing in a great effort to make peace with each other. The context was the controversial Plan of Union of 1801 between Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and it leads straight to the heart of my subject, the prickly <sup>problem</sup> of how to achieve harmony between the drive to mission and the drive to unity, between mission and ecumenics. Mission I see as the lion, and unity as the lamb, though it is obvious that the symbols don't always fit. Ecumenists can be as arrogant as lions, and missionaries as meek as lambs. Well, sometimes. By and large, however, mission by its very nature pursues its purpose with the tenacity of a lion, and proponents

of Christian unity should at least try to achieve peace among the churches by being themselves peaceful, like lambs.

But will they ever learn to lie down together? Not if the Plan of Union of 1801 is any omen for the future. That agreement, hammered out between American Presbyterians and Congregationalists was one of the earliest ecumenical and missionary experiments in American church history. It was also a flat failure.

This is what happened. At the close of the American Revolution, Presbyterians and Congregationalists virtually controlled the new-born country ecclesiastically.<sup>1</sup> As population expanded, Congregational home missionaries following migration west out of New England, and Presbyterian missionaries pushing up from southern New York and the Middle Colonies, ran into each other all the way from upper New York to as far west as Illinois. Whereupon in an unusual burst of interdenominational good feeling the two churches began to talk together about how to avoid unseemly competition.

"Is it wise, is it Christian," asked a Congregational president of Union College in Schenectady, John Blair Smith, "to divide the sparse population holding the same faith, already scattered over the vast new territory, into two distinct ecclesiastical organizations, and thus prevent each from enjoying those means of grace which both might enjoy but for such division?"<sup>2</sup> He was succeeded as president of the college by a Presbyterian, Jonathan Edwards the younger, and it was Edwards who carried an official proposal of a Plan of Union to both the Congregational General Association and the Presbyterian General Assembly. It was accepted by both.

The Plan had four articles. The first centered about mission. It called for mutual forbearance and cooperation among the missionaries of the two churches. The other articles spelled out the ecumenical implications of such cooperation in local congregations. Two articles

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<sup>1</sup>C.A. Briggs, American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History, N.Y.: 1885, pp. 139-140.

<sup>2</sup>H.H. Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., vol I, p. 182 f., 392-394.

allowed congregations to call pastors from either church without changing denominational adherence and polity. The fourth provided regulations for churches with a mixed membership of Presbyterians and Congregationalists. It was an ecumenical, mission-motivated and mission-directed agreement by two of the three leading denominations of the country (the third was Episcopal), and it worked beautifully....for Presbyterians.

For the Congregationalists it was a disaster. The Presbyterians, already stronger outside of New England, simply out-evangelized and out-organized the Congregationalists. Presbyterians were better missionary pastors. My great-grandfather was one of them. One by one, congregations and then whole Associations of congregations in New York and the Western Reserve left the Congregational umbrella to merge into Presbyterian Synods. A.H. Ross has estimated that as a result of the Plan of Union "over two thousand churches which were in origin and usages Congregational were transformed into Presbyterian churches."<sup>3</sup> He may have exaggerated the numbers, but one dismayed opponent of the Plan, Nathaniel Emmons, bitterly complained that when the lion and the lamb lie down together, "the lion has little to fear". The Congregational ecumenical-minded lamb was no match for the Presbyterian mission-driven lion.

Congregationalists salvaged what they could from their losses, left the Plan, and retreated back into New England although the Presbyterians, not surprisingly, were quite willing to continue the arrangement. As a matter of fact they did continue to cooperate, most notably where it operated as joint action in foreign missions with the Congregational-founded American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which was a voluntary society, not a church controlled society. In that organization Presbyterian input was as strong as Congregational up until 1837 for Old School Presbyterians and until 1852

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<sup>3</sup>A.H. Ross, The Church Kingdom: Lectures on Congregationalism...in Andover Theological Seminary, 1882-1886, Boston & Chicago, 1887, p. 300 f. But W.W. Sweet thinks the figure is exaggerated. Sweet, Religion in Colonial America, N.Y.: 1942, p. 259.

for the New School side. The breaking point for both came in large part, and in addition to theological differences, when missionary cooperation was seen as a threat to denominational loyalty. It was at that point, on both sides but at different times, that the ecumenical "lamb" began to lose its enthusiasm for unity and would no longer lie down with the missionary "lion".<sup>4</sup>

Yet that Plan of Union brought together, however briefly, two powerful currents in the growth of the American church, which for a few years there in 1801 felt their need for each other, but could not stay together: the modern missionary movement and the modern movement toward church union. The tensions were not new and are still with us, despite slogans and affirmations to the contrary.

I remember an ecumenical motto pioneered by Bishop Leslie Newbigin at Rolle, Switzerland in 1951. In a shortened form it was "Christ's Calls His Church to Mission and to Unity", and it rolls well off the tongue, but for some reason which I couldn't quite put my finger on, it irritated me. I finally realized that what bothered me was the historically awkward coupling of "mission" and "unity". As I read my church history it sounded like an oxymoron, the rhetorical blending of two contradictory concepts. A call to mission, yes. And a call to unity, yes. But mission and unity? Can lions and lambs lie down together? By and large, in Protestant history at least, hasn't mission come out of disunity, and to a lesser degree, haven't church unions bought decline to Christian missions?

May I remind you again that when the Protestant world mission was born in the 18th century, it came not from the great "mainline" churches that were developing out of the center of the Reformation. It came rather from the disunited sects, the Pietists, the Moravians, the Particular Baptists. Curiously, the Reformers who took their theology from St. Paul side-stepped his mission, the mission which gave life and

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<sup>4</sup>E.A. Park, Memoir of Nathaniel Emmons, etc., (Boston, 1861), quoted by W.W. Sweet, The Presbyterians, (Religion on the American Frontier, vol. II, The Presbyterians, 1783-1840; and vol.III, The Congregationalists, 1783-1814), (N.Y. & London: 1936, 1939), p. 46 f.

meaning to his theology. The work of the Reformers was with Israel (in the N.T. sense), that is, with the Church, but Paul's mission was to the Gentiles, to the heathen.

So when in 1706 Frederick IV of Denmark, who was a devout Lutheran, looked about for his first missionaries, he went not to the Church, but to the Pietists. Organized Lutheranism in his day was thundering against the folly of foreign missions which, as some preachers claimed, was working against the will of God "to convert savages who have nothing human about them but the shape of their bodies".<sup>5</sup> In that first Danish mission to India which marks the beginning of the Protestant world mission there was only one regular Lutheran churchman. The rest were fringe Lutherans, Pietists. And it was the one churchman, I am ashamed to say, who soon gave up the mission to return to the safety of his great united Church in Europe, leaving the mission field to the Pietists.

Or take William Carey, the father of English world missions. It was not until he had left the comforting communion of the Anglican church,--not until he joined the small separatist sect of the Particular Baptists, that his eyes were opened and he began to preach a world mission for the church. He could not even rally all the Particular Baptists around the mission. He called it "A Society founded among the Particular Baptists", not "A Society of the Particular Baptists".<sup>6</sup>

And what happened when my own Presbyterian Church back in the last days of the ecumenical Plan of Union, tried to organize a Board of Foreign Missions. They split the church, cut it in two. They drove half of it right out of the General Assembly. Old School conservatives finding themselves with a bare majority, formed their own Presbyterian Mission Board under the rule of the Assembly, and expelled the New School liberals who insisted upon continuing their independent,

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<sup>5</sup>D.H.-W. Gensichen, in The Student World, No. 1-2, 1960, pp. 119-127 defends the Reformers' theology of missions but admits to an insufficiency in their practice.

<sup>6</sup>Aalbertinus H. Oussoren, William Carey, Especially His Missionary Principles, (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1945), p. 144.

ecumenical cooperation with Congregationalists in a parachurch organization, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission.

Missions and unity? It is an historical contradicition. A hundred years later, in 1936, missions was again splitting the Presbyterians but with an ironic twist. This time it was the liberals who stood for a Presbyterian church missionary society directly related to the General Assembly, and who drove out conservatives for forming an independent, parachurch missionary society.

By and large, it is not out of unity that missions have been born. They are conceived, disturbingly, in disunion. And today, it comes almost as a deathblow to the slogan, "Christ Calls His Church to Mission and to Unity", to discover from the statistics that the churches with apparently the least desire for union but the most urgent sense of evangelistic mission, are becoming the fastest growing churches in the world. What are we asking for, then, when we call for mission and unity? The suicide of the church? It is the splintering sects that are growing both here and abroad. Who would have guessed in 1801 that American Southern Baptists would be larger than the Methodists, and that Pentecostals ("holy rollers" we called them then) would not only outshout but also outnumber Presbyterians.

Had we looked, we could have seen that the handwriting was on the wall 40 years ago. In 1946 when the first much-heralded shipload of missionaries, over 300 of them, sailed for the Orient after the War my brother Charles was aboard bound for India. Arrangements had been carefully made in Hawaii to welcome them on their one-day stopover in the islands. Episcopalians would take care of Episcopal missionaries, Presbyterians would take care of Presbyterians and so forth. So the ship docked, and the good church people gathered under signs proclaiming themselves Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, etc. to make it easy for the missionaries to recognize their hosts. But the "best-laid plans of mice and men gang oft a-gley".<sup>7</sup> The denominational missionaries trooped decorously to the signs, all right, but behind

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<sup>7</sup>Charles Hull Moffett, letter, Dec. 9, 1946.

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them, unexpected and unwelcomed were the hosts of the "unwashed",-- the sects, the faith groups, the independents--milling about uncertainly on the dock but advancing to the world mission in far greater numbers at least, if not with greater unity and judgment, than we. (I speak as a loyal, embarrassed mainline Protestant).

Some of us recently planned an ecumenical mission consultation of Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Conciliar Protestants, and Evangelical Protestants. (I don't particularly like the labels, but those are what we were given). The overall theme was "Divided Churches/Common Witness: An Unfinished Task for U.S. Christians". But we were almost immediately confronted with an uncomfortable disproportion in the Protestant representation. Only about 20% of the Protestants at the consultation were non-conciliar evangelicals, and 80% were conciliar Protestants, whereas the statistics of missionary personnel on the field are almost exactly reversed. More than 80% of American Protestant career missionaries are not serving under conciliar organizations, and less than 20% (perhaps even under 10%) are sent out under the ecumenical label of churches in full membership in the N.C.C.'s Division of Overseas Mission. For over forty years mainline missions as a visible, vigorous presence have been retreating into the shadows. Has emphasis on our unity shouldered aside evangelism and mission? And is the villain in all this the rise of the ecumenical movement?

These are questions that many are asking with considerable anguish. Can, in fact, the lion and the lamb ever this side of the millennium lie down together? Or if they can, should they? Perhaps unity and mission will always be mutually destructive goals, in which case would it not be better for Christians to go their separate ways, some to exhibit peace and unity, and some to go forth in combat to mission. One even begins to wonder if perhaps in the church, as in Toynbee's overarching analysis of civilizations, unity and consolidation are signs not of vigor, but of decline. Or on the other hand, appalled at the church's disunity one might just as reasonably conclude that its bitter, biting internal controversies have already destroyed its effectiveness in mission. My nephew passed on to me this description of a cartoon he had seen. One character moans, "Bickering, backbiting,

politics, corruption--it's all too depressing!" A second character says "Makes you grateful for the church, doesn't it." And the first replies, "I was talking about the church'."

II. But I have been gloomy long enough. I have purposely accented the strain between unity and mission, and probably exaggerated it, in order to highlight the fact that the most serious and crippling divisions of the churches of our twentieth century still swirl around the prickly issues of missionary evangelism and unity. But now it is time to face those pessimistic questions head on. No, the villain is not the ecumenical movement. And no, unity does not make mission obsolete. And no, the church will not destroy itself, not even by trying its best to fall apart. What the churches need in their present situation is not more discouragement but a touch of hope and a quickening of faith and a renewed commitment to both mandates: to mission and to unity. In the dark night, if that is where we are, we need something of the tough optimism of an Adoniram Judson who, after prisons and death marches and the loss of his dear wife could declare in what seemed a time without hope and without a future, that by God's grace even the darkest night turns to day, and that "the future is as bright as the promises of God".

So now let me turn from the problems to some signs of hope. Let me mention three, out of many others that could be named. First, even the most zealous advocates of mission are discovering that Christian mission needs Christian unity. Second, even the most ardent proponents of church unity are discovering that unity is not an end in itself; it demands the larger purposes of a Christian mission to a world still not effectively reached with the good news of the gospel. And third, neither its unity nor its mission belongs to the church; they are the gift and mandate of God.

Look first with me at the discovery of the need for unity. Suppose we grant that one-sided, inward-looking preoccupation with the unity of the church has brought a lamentable retreat from mission. Is the only alternative a one-sided stress on missions that will further tear apart the already grievously divided Body of Christ? Must mission always mean an end to unity?

Quite the opposite. Yes, zeal for missions has too often led to controversy and division, but the other side of the coin is that in modern times it was precisely in the practice of their mission that the divided churches of Protestantism first discovered the practical urgencies of their need for Christian unity.

I used William Carey as an example of mission proceeding from division, not unity. But he is also an example of a call to unity that came from mission. True, he had left England separated from the Anglican communion and convinced that each denomination should work separately in its foreign fields to avoid discord and confusion. But twelve years of work in India taught him that Particular Baptists working alone, however zealous might be their zeal for mission, would never by themselves make much of an impression on a massively unbelieving world. So in 1805 he called for a world missionary conference "of all denominations" to meet in South Africa to discuss the challenge of a world mission common to them all. Carey was ahead of his time not only as the pioneer of English world missions, but also in ecumenical recognition of the need for unity. Unfortunately neither his own Particular Baptists nor the Anglicans from whom he had separated were interested in his impossible dream.

One of the earliest examples of how mission not only needs unity but can actually produce it comes from China, and is described by Daniel Fleming in his book Devolution in Missions Administration.<sup>8</sup> In the coastal city of Amoy in the 1850s an English Presbyterian mission and an American Dutch Reformed mission had each been successful in planting a number of city congregations. The time had come, they thought, to form the churches into presbyteries. Normally the English would have formed a presbytery reporting back to the General Assembly in England, and the American Dutch would organize a classis under the jurisdiction of their General Synod in New Jersey.

But the two groups had been working together in such happy harmony that the Chinese Christians scarcely realized that their

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel Fleming, Devolution in Missions Administration, (N.Y.: Revell, 1916) p. 50 ff.

missionaries belonged to different churches at home. Wisely, the missionaries decided to ask their respective home churches for permission to form one single presbytery out of the two groups. Why divide the Chinese church by imported foreign disunities? The Assembly in England agreed but the Dutch in America were more stubborn. "Form your classis (presbytery)," they told the missionaries, "but keep it under our own General Synod".

That might well have been the end of that first, tentative gesture toward Christian unity in China had not the Dutch missionaries been as stubborn as their home Synod. Fleming describes the missionary reaction. What would happen, their spokesman Dr. Talmage asked, if we insist that a Chinese presbytery must be subject to the higher decisions of an American General Synod? You say that this would insure justice and direction and help in case difficult problems arise in the Chinese presbytery? But how will you deal with a complaint from a Chinese Christian who hasn't the money for a trip to New York, and who doesn't speak English? You would ask me to interpret for him? But his complaint might be against me, the missionary. And besides, he wrote, how much do you know in New Jersey about the kinds of puzzling problems that our presbytery here in China, in a completely different setting and culture, is likely to face. No, he concluded, "don't impose a yoke like this on the little church which God is gathering..in that far-off land." Let the Chinese presbytery be independent and united. And if you won't, then our answer must be that we can no longer serve you here. Bring us, your missionaries, home and replace us with ones who will do what you want to do but which to us seems wrong.<sup>9</sup>

But the most extensive and dramatic example of Christian unity successfully demonstrated, and succeeding in fact principally because of the demands and urgencies of Christian mission, is the formation of the Church of South India in 1947. It was not done overnight. It took forty-six years, beginning like the lamented Plan of Union with a union

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-54.

of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, but boldly dreaming of wider and more dangerous structures of unity to include Methodists and even Anglicans.

Some were sure that was going too far. How could stiff Presbyterians whose fathers had died fighting against "bishops in the kirk" accept the robed prelates of the Anglican establishment into their freely covenanted midst? And how did they expect a high-church Anglican of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel who refused to associate with his late-come, low-church evangelicals in the other Anglican mission, the Church Missionary Society--how could they bring him to take communion from a Congregationalist whose sacrament of the Lord's Supper he has just described as "nothing but a tea party"?<sup>10</sup> And how did they expect English Methodists who had broken away from the apostolic episcopate into the free life of the Spirit, to return to what they were quite sure would be an ecclesiastical strait-jacket, a church without fire?

But they did it. All in all it took them more than forty-six years but they did it. What was the driving force that kept those missionaries and their Indian colleagues working away against all obstacles toward unity?

The first answer is an evangelistic answer, the answer of an evangelist like Azariah of Dornakal, first Indian bishop of the Anglican church. In 1935 Bishop Azariah had an interview with Dr. Ambedkar, leader of India's millions of untouchable, the outcastes. Ambedkar was disillusioned with Hinduism which he held responsible for the caste system. "Hinduism is not a religion; it is a disease," he said. Would he then bring his millions into the Christian faith? asked the Anglican bishop. "Your people are deeply religious. They cannot live without a religion", he said. "It is not enough to give up Hinduism. They must have something else." And he offered them Christian faith. Dr. Ambedkar thought deeply, and said. "I am well aware of all that the Christian church has done for the outcastes... But we Harijans are one

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<sup>10</sup>Bengt Sundkler, The Church of South India, (London: 1954), p. 20. This is the best history of the union.

community all over India, and our strength is in our unity. Can you in the Christian church offer us any unity comparable to that?" And the bishop was silent.

That is the evangelistic answer: Christian disunity in South India was a sin., and was turning countless millions away from salvation in Christ. It was the painful recognition of this fact that brought the Anglicans into the discussions that led to unity.

Another answer is theological, the answer of a missionary theologian like Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. The church must be united, he said, because that is the will of God. If you object, "What's wrong with different branches of one church," he replies, "They are not different branches; they are broken parts of a body, the Body of Christ, and while they are broken He remains crucified." If you further object, "But reunion must be the work of the Spirit, not the work of a 'man-made' scheme", he replies, "That is like the old argument against missions, 'If God wants to convert the heathen he'll do it in his own time and in his own way'." <sup>11</sup>

Only when the proponents and opponents of the Indian Plan of Union faced up to basic missionary and Biblical imperatives were their missionary hearts willing to yield on some dearly held denominational sticking points, and even then only when they were assured that the unity they were seeking was not to be bought at the price of surrendering the essentials of the faith. They stood fast on four fundamentals: the authority of the Bible as the revealed Word of God; second, an adequate creedal expression of the essentials of the Word, as found in two historic creeds, the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed; third, the two sacraments of the Reformation, the Lord's Supper and Baptism; and finally and most difficult of all, the bishop. But this last point of church order was ~~was~~ accepted only after careful definition of the episcopate as "historic", not as "apostolic".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme, (N.Y.: Harper, 1948), p. 104.

<sup>12</sup>See the detailed discussion in B. Sundkler, op. cit.

So at last in 1947 the lions and the lambs from five major confessional traditions, Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, Methodist and Anglican, came together as the Church of South India to answer Christ's call to unity because they believed it was the only possible way to answer with any effectiveness his call to mission in India. Many problems remain; many definitions must be made more clear, and there are some who wonder whether the visible unity thus achieved has been matched by equally visible signs of mission. But forty years later that church still stands united, and, in the words of Stephen Neill, "Here for once it was possible to show Christian faith as a uniting force through which men of different castes, backgrounds and traditions, separated for centuries in Hinduism, could be brought into living unity with Jesus Christ and with one another.."13

But just as surely as missions needs unity, unity needs mission. In the Kingdom of God the lamb needs the lion. Unity is not just for sheep; it is not an end in itself. The very word "ecumenical", should remind us of that. If "oikumene" means world, as it does, then ecumenics derives its root meaning more from the challenge of a world that needs to know Christ than from the challenge of separated churches that do not obey Him.

Ten years after the formation of the World Council of Churches, its first General Secretary, W.A. Visser 't Hooft, began to fear that the drive for unity might be taken as a substitute for mission, and citing New Testament usage of the word "gathering" to connote not merely unity but at the same time, mission, he turned to Matthew 12:30, "He who does not gather with me scatters", to warn that "if the Church is not a missionary church, if evangelism is not one of its vital functions, it shares responsibility for the confusion and antagonism which prevail in the world."14 In other words if what the

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<sup>13</sup>Stephen Neill, The Story of the Christian Church in India and Pakistan, (London: 1970), p. 154.

<sup>14</sup>W.A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Gathering of the Scattered Children of  
(Footnote Continued)

church gathers is only what is already in it, that kind of ecumenics instead of uniting churches will divide and scatter them.

Moreover, had the movement toward church unity developed without the missionary and evangelistic imperatives that were its major historical roots, it would have had no world churches for a world council to unite. It was 19th century evangelistic missions that for the first time in history gave us a world-wide church. In the memorable words of Archbishop Temple:

"As though in preparation for such a time as this, God has been building up a Christian fellowship which now extends into almost every nation, and binds citizens of them all together in true unity and mutual love. No human agency has planned this. It is the result of the great missionary enterprise of the last hundred and fifty years. Neither the missionaries nor those who sent them out were aiming at the creation of a world-wide fellowship interpenetrating the nations, bridging the gulfs between them, and supplying the promise of a check to their rivalries. The aim for nearly the whole period was to preach the gospel to as many individuals as could be reached so that those who were won to discipleship should be put in the way of eternal salvation. Almost incidentally the great world fellowship has arisen; it is the great new fact of our era..."<sup>15</sup>

This "great new fact", this ecumenical church, this worldwide Christian fellowship, arose from no tightly managed drive for the reorganization of the structures of the church, but "almost incidentally", as the archbishop said, it was born in the evangelism of the Christian mission.

There is one last word, however, that needs to be said about mission and unity. The ultimate ground for binding mission to unity and unity to mission is not that they need each other, but that this is the

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God", in E. Jurji, The Ecumenical Era in Church and Society. N.Y.: Macmillan, 1959, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>William Temple, The Church Looks Forward, pp. 1-3.

will of God. It is our Lord himself who most definitively links the missionary proclamation of the gospel to the unity of His Body, the Church. However I may have once questioned on historical grounds the ecumenical slogan I quoted earlier, "Christ Calls His Church to Mission and to Unity", I must now acknowledge that its authenticity and its authority need not derive from history, for they come from the Lord of history. In the great Lord's prayer of the gospel of John, Jesus prays, "that they [his disciples] may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast loved them..."

I am quite aware that the verse has been used as loosely by ecumenists, as "Come ye forth from among them and be ye separate" has been misused by separatists, but whatever else the words may mean, they join together in mission and in unity all who call themselves His disciples. They mean this, as the context of that verse makes very clear. They mean that the unity of the Church is a unity of grace and spirit, of truth and salvation, of visible love and of one great missionary purpose.

The unity of the disciples is not theirs to create; it is the gift of God's grace, for it is the Father who keeps them in his name and gives them to his son "that they may be one" (vs. 11). And it is not a structural unity but a unity of being, "as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father" (vs. 20). And it is a unity of salvation--"Keep them from the evil one" (vs. 16). And a unity of truth--"Consecrate them in the truth.." (vs. 17). These are fundamental to any description of Christian unity, but so also are these: it is a unity of love and a unity for mission. It is the love, not the structure that makes unity Christian and visible, "so that the world may know that thou..hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.." (vs. 23). And its one great purpose is mission. "That the world may believe.." "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (vs. 18 and 20:21).

This is John's version of the Great Commission, unity and mission, as our Lord brings the two themes together indissolubly in prayer, a prayer spoken on the way to the cross, spoken in an agony of earnestness. Mission and unity; the lion and the lamb. And Isaiah adds, "a little child shall lead them". Not a pope, not a Council, not even a seminary. No, the lion and the lamb do not easily lie down

together even yet. But "a little child shall lead them", the child who came as a babe to call them, and who died on a cross to save them, and who will come again as King to bring the lions and the lambs together into his "peaceable kingdom".

-- Samuel Hugh Moffett

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